

As Suharto's crisis deepens

# Crucial political questions face the Indonesian masses

Editorial Board  
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Suharto has cut short his visit to Egypt to return to a country wracked by mass protest and rioting. With growing demands for his resignation not only from Indonesian students and workers, but also from elements within the economic elite at home and leading organs of international capital abroad, the continuation of Suharto's 32-year dictatorship is being called into question.

It is, however, by no means a foregone conclusion that Suharto will step down. There remains considerable trepidation within both the international bourgeoisie and Indonesian business and military circles over his removal, in large measure because they are not convinced they have a credible alternative to put in his place.

But even were the 76-year-old strongman to go, his departure would mark not the end, but rather only the beginning of the immense political challenges facing the Indonesian masses. The unfolding social upheaval raises a series of critical issues.

Most fundamentally, the collapse of the so-called Asian economic miracle has exposed the inability of the profit system and the capitalist market to provide for the needs of the vast majority of the people. In the final analysis, the Suharto regime and similar tyrannies in other Asian countries were the political mechanisms employed by the international banks and corporations, and the governments that do their bidding, to develop capitalist relations in the region.

Vast new areas for profit-making, taking advantage of rich natural resources and the exploitation of cheap labor, were developed. Invariably, capitalist expansion was based on a mountain of corpses -- like the million or more workers slaughtered by Suharto in the US-backed coup of 1965-66 that brought him to power.

If today the imperialist powers that backed the dictator for more than three decades are considering looking elsewhere, it is only because they have lost confidence in his ability to pay off the country's liabilities to the big banks and the

financiers' global debt-collector, the International Monetary Fund. The capitalist press from Washington, to Bonn, to Tokyo and Sydney is awash with editorials and commentaries appealing for Suharto's military to intervene and either assume direct control, or install a frontman who would be designated the bearer of democratic reform, the better to crush the social danger to capitalist interests from below and impose the economic measures demanded by the IMF and the international banks.

Thus the *New York Times*, in an editorial on May 15 entitled 'Sunset for President Suharto,' suggested the time had come for the military to step in ('...even the army may turn against him to end the bloodshed...') However, as the editorial went on to make clear, the *Times'* aversion to bloodshed is selective. It wants the killing of student protesters stopped, at least for the present, and the army's firepower concentrated instead on the more impoverished and desperate layers: 'The military should refuse to repress peaceful protests and turn its attention to stopping looting and mob violence.'

On this basis it urges the installation of an Indonesian equivalent of the 'reform' government of Kim Dae Jung in South Korea, who, the *Times* points out, 'has persuaded citizens to accept measures that his predecessor could not.'

Indonesian workers, poor farmers and students should take note of the *Times'* prescription for their country. It should help both to dispel illusions in the democratic pretensions of the US, and to counter misplaced confidence in Suharto's bourgeois opposition.

The example of the Kim Dae Jung government demonstrates precisely that the elevation of bourgeois liberals to power -- even those with certain oppositional credentials -- by no means resolves the questions of democratic rights and social deprivation that confront the masses. On the contrary, such regimes become new mechanisms for imposing the dictates of international capital and the interests of the native exploiters, and inevitably

prepare the way for new rounds of bloody repression.

Every bourgeois party and politician in Indonesia is tainted not only by a history of collaboration with Suharto, but also by an objective dependence on the lending agencies of capitalism. They speak not for the working class and oppressed, but rather for a narrow elite whose privileged position depends on the exploitation of the workers and the backing of the transnational corporations and imperialist governments.

The mass student movement must maintain its complete political independence from the representatives of the Indonesian bourgeoisie. No confidence should be placed in figures such as Amien Rais, the leader of the country's main Islamic organization, or Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter to Suharto's predecessor, Achmed Sukarno.

Megawati Sukarnoputri is being likened to Corazon Aquino, the bourgeois reform figure utilized by the US to replace the Marcos regime in the Philippines twelve years ago. No one should have any illusions that Aquino and her 'people's power' movement served to liberate the Filipino masses from imperialist domination, exploitation or poverty. On the contrary, their essential role was to maintain the status quo and uphold the interests of international capital, under conditions in which Marcos had become so discredited that he was increasingly unable to do so.

Moreover, Aquino came to power at the high point of the economic upswing in southeast Asia. A Megawati or Rais would come to power in Indonesia under the opposite conditions -- in the midst of an economic collapse. They would have far less room to maneuver, and consequently their democratic pretensions would give way all the more rapidly to the imposition of austerity policies and the police-military measures needed to enforce them.

The social force to which the students must turn in the struggle against dictatorship and social deprivation is the Indonesian working class, whose numbers and social power have grown enormously over the past quarter century.

What then are the central tasks that confront the Indonesian masses? A whole series of interconnected democratic and social issues stand to be resolved. The basic questions of democratic rights--freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of the press, a genuinely democratic government--cannot be resolved independently of the great social questions--the abolition of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy. And no genuine and progressive resolution of the social issues is possible without an assault on all forms of class privilege and a struggle for social, as well as political, equality. Finally, the struggle for democracy and equality is a fight against the domination of imperialism and its agents within Indonesia.

Together with the demand for full democratic rights, the

mass movement must raise the social and economic demands without which genuine democracy and decent living conditions are impossible. These include:

- The repudiation of the national debt, i.e., the means by which the imperialist banks maintain their strangle-hold over the Indonesian economy and extract super-profits from the exploitation of the workers.

- The confiscation of the big banks and industries controlled by the Suharto family and their cronies, and their transformation into publicly-owned entities, under the democratic control of the working people.

To realize these demands, the masses of workers must build up their own, independent and democratic organs of political power. Based on the factories, work locations and rural work sites, the workers should strive for the establishment of workers' councils, to create the popular basis for a workers' government.

As the events of the past year throughout Asia have underscored, the same basic issues that confront the workers and oppressed masses in Indonesia confront their brothers and sisters in Thailand, Korea, Malaysia, China and, as is becoming increasingly clear, Japan. The working people of Indonesia should take the lead in establishing the unity in struggle of the working class throughout Asia.

Events in Indonesia are demonstrating with explosive force the fact that workers all over the world are entering a new revolutionary epoch. The crucial task, upon which the fate of the world's masses depends, is the building of an international revolutionary party. This party is embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International, whose central political instrument is the *World Socialist Web Site*.

*Also in Indonesian and German*

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